

Fall 2019

HIST 214-001: Technology and Culture in American History

Stephen Pemberton

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Pemberton, Stephen, "HIST 214-001: Technology and Culture in American History" (2019). *History Syllabi*. 19.
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TECHNOLOGY AND CULTURE IN AMERICAN HISTORY

History 214

FALL 2019 SYLLABUS

Prof. Stephen Pemberton
Federated Department of History
New Jersey Institute of Technology

Class Meetings

Central King Building (CKB) 320
2:30 – 3:50 p.m. Mondays & Thursdays

Office & Contact

Cullimore Hall 325, NJIT Campus
Phone: 973-596-5716
Email: stephen.pemberton@njit.edu

Office Hours

Mondays, 4-5 p.m. and by appointment on Mondays and Thursdays.

This course examines the relationship between technology and culture in the history of the United States of America by exploring how technology has played a central organizing role in the making of American society from colonial times to the present. The course will introduce students to critical questions that link technology to influential cultures within American society. What has technology meant to Americans across the decades? How have Americans construed progress in relation to technology? What is the relation between technology and democracy in the United States? Through historical case studies, students will learn to ask and address such questions on their own. They will learn how cultural and historical contexts have shaped technologies as well as how such contexts were shaped by these technologies. Finally, the course will encourage students to think critically about technology and culture in historical context – with special focus on how the quality of one's advocacy or criticism of specific technologies can affect the democratic process for better and/or worse.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- *Demonstrate* understanding of the relationship between technology and American culture at various points in the history of the United States of America.
- *Understand, analyze, and differentiate* key terms and ideas in the history of technology
- *Identify and analyze* primary sources in their historical contexts
- *Identify, analyze, and utilize* secondary sources to make historical arguments
- *Demonstrate* information literacy consistent with being an undergraduate student: including (1) locating, retrieving and evaluating information relevant to the writing of a college-level argumentative essay; (2) organizing, synthesizing and communicating that information in clear, persuasive prose; and (3) producing written essays that employ principles consistent with the ethical and legal uses of information.

Prerequisites

HUM 101 and HUM 102 with a grade of C or higher; HUM 102 may be taken concurrently with HIST 214.

Course Webpage.

There is a Canvas webpage for this course that the professor and class will utilize throughout the semester. Please consult this website regularly, preferably at least once before every class meeting. It contains the syllabus, assignments, readings, and other features that will enhance your learning experience this semester. **You can access Canvas [here](#).**

Readings and Online Access to Videos

All course readings are freely available on the course webpage, internet, or NJIT Library. Students should follow the semester schedule below to determine what readings to complete for each class period. The readings include newspaper or magazine articles, scholarly essays, articles, or book chapters. Readings are accessible through the course webpage as pdfs or hyperlinks.

Students will need to view a documentary or movie on a couple of assignments. All of the relevant video material is currently available on *Netflix* or *Amazon*. Students will need to acquire access to these material on their own in order to complete these assignments.

Assignments and Grading

The primary goal of this course is to promote critical thinking about technology and culture in the context of American history. All students will be evaluated on their written and oral communication.

The course grade is determined as follows:

Assignments

Participation	10%
In-Class Activities	25%
First Exam	10%
Reading Responses	25%
Final Exam	30%

Grading Scale for Assignments

A	=	89.5 to 100
B+	=	86.5 to 89.4
B	=	79.5 to 86.4
C+	=	76.5 to 79.4
D	=	59.5 to 69.4
F	=	59.4 to 0

Course Grade	100%
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Consistent effort and improvement are weighted heavily in grading.

Passing this class with a C or higher is unlikely without completing each assignment in a timely fashion.

Due Dates for Major Assignments

In-Class Activities (at least 10)	due	regularly, as indicated in schedule
First Exam	due	10/3
Reading Responses (5)	due	9/9, 9/23, 10/14, 11/7, 11/18
Final Exam	due	12/16

Participation

Participation counts **10%** of the course grade. The class participation grade will reflect both the student's attendance record as well as the student's performance in classroom activities.

Attendance Policy. Attendance accounts for 2/3rds of the participation grade. Missing even a single class is not recommended. However, each student is allowed to miss two full class periods without penalty to his or her participation grade. It is highly recommended that you consult with the professor about any missed class time beyond two classes. Class time missed beyond the two "excused" classes will result in substantial reductions in the student's participation grade (as calculated as a percentage of formal contact hours in the classroom for the semester). The professor will consider excusing repeat absences under extraordinary circumstances that can be verified by the Dean of Students Office. See policy on "Student Accommodations" below for further details.

Classroom Performance. The student's verbal engagement with classroom activities accounts for 1/3rd of the participation grade. Each student should come to class promptly and regularly, actively listen to the lectures, and be prepared to discuss the readings assigned for the day. Students should respect the learning environment by arriving on time and staying the full term of the session. The student's comprehension of the assigned readings is graded in this course. The professor will evaluate reading comprehension, in part, by taking account of each student's contributions to in-class discussions. Students should promptly communicate any concerns about their ability to meet these requirements with the professor. Students who participate regularly in discussion, and do so constructively, will be rewarded with higher grades in their final participation grade. Merely coming to class does not constitute engagement (because attendance is considered a separate component of participation). The student must contribute to the learning environment to receive credit in this area. The professor will also consider improvement and other factors in his assessment of each student's participation grade, and he reserves the right to award extra credit to students who make substantial contributions to the learning environment.

In-Class Activities

The student's ability to discuss the readings in written form is assessed throughout this course. The professor will evaluate the student's fluency with the readings by assessing student performance on in-class writing activities. **There are no make-ups given for students who miss the activity during normal class time. The top 10 of 20 possible responses will count toward the in-class activities grade. At least 7 of these assignments must be completed by the withdrawal date for NJIT courses (Monday, November 11).** Together, in-class activities equal **25%** of the final course grade.

Reading Responses

The professor will also evaluate the student's fluency with the readings by assessing student performance on short written response essays that the student will periodically complete online during the course of the semester. **The student must complete all five of these assignments online in advance of the designated class.** Together, these reading responses equal **25%** of the final course grade.

Exams

There are two take-home exams in this course that require students to write a series of short essays. The first exam, early in the semester, counts **10%** of the course grade. The final exam will be due during exam week as indicated in the schedule, and counts **30%** of the course grade.

Respect for Persons and the Learning Environment

In the interest of an open exchange of ideas and collegiality, everyone participating in the class should strive to respect their classmates as persons. The professor will make every effort to facilitate a respectful environment for learning, but students should keep in mind their own responsibilities in the classroom.

Students are expected to limit cell phone, tablet, and lap top use to class-related activities only. Texting and social media in class are not allowed. Web-surfing unrelated to class, along with texting and social media usage, are disruptive of a respectful learning environment. The professor reserves the right to ask you to leave the classroom for any behaviors that do not meet the expectations of a proper, professional learning environment.

Essential Resources for Excelling in this Course

To excel in this course, you are expected to be able to locate and use web AND library resources effectively and cite your sources correctly. Googling alone will not suffice. Most of the library materials are available online 24/7 from anywhere. Try a search in **SEARCH EVERYTHING**. Self-help materials on finding books and articles can be found in the **Tutorials Guide**.

NJIT Librarian Dr. David Scharf is the expert to contact to field your questions about how the library's resources can help you succeed in this class. Her contact information is **here**.

Dr. Scharf also maintains a variety of website at NJIT Van Houghton Library that can aid your research and learning in this class.

Tutorials appropriate to doing coursework in a history class, such as this one, can be found **here**.

Tutorials that explain acceptable academic writing for this course are available **here**.

Tutorials on how to cite sources in your academic writing are **here**. Proper citation will help you avoid plagiarism. Students can use the APA, MLA or Chicago citation styles in their written work. You should pick one of these standard styles and apply it properly in your formal writing for this course.

Tutorials on how to evaluate appropriate online source material can be found **here**.

Reading the daily news is also strongly encouraged while taking this course. As an NJIT Student, you qualify for a **free subscription** to *The New York Times*. *This free subscription includes access to the NY Times news archive, which dates back to 1851!*

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

Academic integrity is enforced in this course. Academic Integrity is the cornerstone of higher education and is central to the ideals of this course and the university. Cheating is strictly prohibited and devalues the degree that you are working on. As a member of the NJIT community, it is your responsibility to protect your educational investment by knowing and following the academic code of integrity policy that is found **here**.

It is the instructor's professional obligation and responsibility to report any academic misconduct to the Dean of Students Office. Any student found in violation of the code by cheating, plagiarizing or using any online software inappropriately will result in disciplinary action. This may include a failing grade of F, and/or suspension or dismissal from the university. If you have any questions about the code of Academic Integrity, please contact the Dean of Students Office at **dos@njit.edu**.

Students are also responsible for upholding the integrity of NJIT by reporting any violation of academic to the **Dean of Students Office**. The identity of the student filing any academic integrity violation will always remain anonymous.

Again, all students are expected to abide by the norms outlined in these websites, this syllabus as well as the Canvas course page for this class, and students will be penalized for failure to do so. Please consult the professor if you have any concerns about academic integrity, academic reading, writing and citation, plagiarism or their meanings in actual practice.

Students will also be required to submit their original written work online via Canvas. Student work submitted online will be subject to review by **Turnitin.com**, an online service used by NJIT instructors to detect plagiarism and irregularities in sourcing and citation of the written word and claims.

Student Accommodations and Privacy

If a student needs accommodation in the classroom for illness, disability, death in family, religious reasons, etc., University Policy dictates that the student must inform the **Dean of Students Office**. Instructors can only accommodate a student at the direction of the Dean's Office.

Students with disabilities should also contact NJIT's **Student Disability Services (SDS)** for any necessary accommodations related to their disability **here**. SDS will communicate your specific needs to the professor, ensuring that your disability-related accommodations for the class and assignments are met without your having to divulge any private health information to the professor or anyone else in the class.

Students who have concerns that might impact their learning experience beyond the issues stated above may identify the nature of that concern with the professor so that he may advise you appropriately. The professor will hold all individual communication with students in confidence.

SEMESTER SCHEDULE:

BEFORE EACH CLASS MEETING:

Review the course syllabus while visiting the course webpage to determine your responsibilities. The daily reading/s and assignment are listed below for each class.

Thurs, Sept 5. Do Americans ♥ Technology? A Skeptics Introduction to Technology and Culture in U.S. History

In-Class Reading: Eric Shatzberg, “Want to Fix the Tech Industry? Start with the Humanities,” *The Washington Post*, June 19, 2019. [Link](#)

In-Class Activity 1 *In-class activities are based on the reading/s for the day.*

Mon, Sept 9. The Politics of Technology

Two Readings: Langdon Winner, “Do Artefacts Have Politics?” *Daedalus*, Vol. 109, No. 1, (Winter, 1980), pgs. 121-136, and Zachary Wolf, “The Robots are Coming for Your Job, Too?” *CNN*, August 24, 2019. [Link](#)

Reading Response Assignment 1 (Due Online Before Class)

Thurs, Sept 12. Technologies of Empire / Founding Narratives of 1492

Reading: Jill Lepore, “The Nature of the Past,” in *These Truths: A History of the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2018), pp. 3-30.

In-Class Activity 2

Mon, Sept 16. Founding Narratives of Jamestown and Plymouth

Reading: Selections Merritt Roe Smith and George Clancy, eds. *Major Problems in the History of American Technology* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998).

Two Primary Sources:

- “William Bradford on Squanto, 1620-21,” pp. 27-28
- “The Reverend John Eliot on the ‘Praying Indians,’ 1647-77,” pp. 28-31

Secondary Source:

- Patrick Malone, “The Skulking Way of War,” pp. 41-52

In-Class Activity 3

Thurs, Sept 19. The Smallpox Inoculation Controversy, 1721-22

Reading: Selections from John Harley Warner and Janet A. Tighe, eds. *Major Problems in the History of American Medicine and Public Health* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001).

Three Primary Sources:

- “Cotton Mather, Boston Minister Proselytizes for Smallpox Inoculation, 1722,” pp. 30-33.
- “William Douglass, a Boston Physician, Decries the Dangerous ‘Infatuation’ with Smallpox Inoculation, 1722,” pp. 33-34.
- “Zabdiel Boylston of Boston Recounts His Experiences as the First Physician to Inoculate Against Smallpox in the American Colonies, 1726,” pp. 36-37.

Secondary Source:

- John B. Blake, “Smallpox Inoculation Foments Controversy in Boston,” pp. 48-54.

In-Class Activity 4

Mon, Sept 23. Technology and Republican Values / Printing Press Culture / Copyrights and Patents

Reading: Discussion – Print Culture

Primary Sources – Choose two documents dating from 1763-1800 from the U.S. Library of Congress document collection of printed ephemera below:

<https://www.loc.gov/collections/broadsides-and-other-printed-ephemera/>

Please address the following questions for each document you chose:

- What is the topic?
- When was it written?
- Who is the intended audience?
- What are you able to say about the author/s?
- What does the document communicate about American culture and/or technology of its time and place?
- How does it communicate that message?
- What do you learn from reading this document that makes it significant to you?

Reading Response Assignment 2 (Due Online Before Class)

Thurs, Sept 26. Diverse Cultural Experiences and the Making of “Americans”

Reading: Please read all four selections for our class discussion.

- Jill Lepore, “The Question Stated,” in *These Truths: A History of the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2018), pp. x-xx.
- “African Americans at Jamestown,” National Park Service [Website](#)
- Excerpt from Nikole Hannah-Jones, “The Idea of America,” *The 1619 Project of The New York Times Magazine* (August 2019). [Link to Excerpt](#). The full issue of *The 1619 Project* with imagery is available [here](#) (print format) and [here](#) (online).
- Adam Bruno’s [comments](#) on *The 1619 Project* from the History News Network.

In-Class Activity 5

Mon, Sept 30. What Makes a Nation?

Reading: Selections from Jill Lepore, *This America: The Case for the Nation* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2019), pp. 15-33.

In-Class Activity 6

Thurs, Oct 3. Exam I Due

No Class Meeting / Complete Exam I Online

Mon, Oct 7. “America” as Second Nature

Reading: Selections from David E. Nye, *America as Second Creation: Technology and Narratives of New Beginnings* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003), pp. 3-7, 8-20.

In-Class Activity 7

Thurs, Oct 10. The 19th-Century Mill, Pollution, and Class Conflict

Reading: Selections from David E. Nye, *America as Second Creation: Technology and Narratives of New Beginnings* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003), pp. 91-116.

In-Class Activity 8

Mon, Oct 14. Factory Life

Reading: Discussion – *Lowell Offering*, selections, 1840

Primary Sources – Please choose at least 2 articles and respond to the following questions for each document you chose:

- What is the topic?
- When was it written?
- Who is the intended audience?
- What are you able to say about the author/s?
- What does the document communicate about factory life for women in that time and place?
- How does it communicate that message?
- What do you learn from reading this document that makes it significant to you?

Reading Response Assignment 3 (Due Online Before Class)

Thurs, Oct 17. The Slave Labor System

Two Readings: Selections on the Baltimore Shipyard from Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, originally published 1845, approximately 3 pages, and David Blight, *Frederick Douglass, Prophet of Freedom* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2018), pp. 48-81.

In-Class Activity 9

Mon, Oct 21. American Slavery, Culture, and Technological Momentum

Reading: Khalil Muhammad, “The Sugar that Saturates the American Diet has a Barbaric History as the ‘White Gold’ that fueled Slavery,” in *The 1619 Project of The New York Times Magazine* (August 18, 2019). [Link](#) (online format). Muhammad’s article appears on p. 70 of the full issue of *The 1619 Project* [here](#) (print format).

In-Class Activity 10

Thurs, Oct 24. The Gilded Age / Invention and Inventors / The Cultures of Telephony

Reading: Thomas Hughes, “A Gigantic Tidal Wave of Ingenuity,” in *American Genesis: A Century of Invention and Technological Enthusiasm, 1870-1970* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), pp. 13-52.

In-Class Activity 11

Mon, Oct 28. Industrial Society and Technological Systems

Reading: Please read this primary source alongside the secondary source.

Primary Source:

- Selections from Frederick Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management*, originally published 1911.

Secondary Source:

- Thomas Hughes, “The System Must Be First,” in *American Genesis: A Century of Invention and Technological Enthusiasm, 1870-1970* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), pp. 185-220, 243-248.

In-Class Activity 12

Thurs, Oct 31. What is Progressivism? / On Historical Actors and Historians Assessing Technology

Reading: David Edgerton, Selections from *The Shock of the Old: Technology and Global History Since 1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. ix-xviii, 1-27.

In-Class Activity 13

Mon, Nov 4. The Technologies of War

Reading: Selections from Freeman Dyson, *Disturbing the Universe* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), pp. 3-10, 19-32.

In-Class Activity 14

Discussion of Final Exam Questions Due on December 16.

Thurs, Nov 7. The Atomic Bomb and Cold War Science and Technology

Reading: Selections from Freeman Dyson, *Disturbing the Universe* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), pp. 33-44, 69-83.

Reading Response Assignment 4 (This assignment will be distributed and completed online before class)

Mon, Nov 11. Cold War Cultures

Reading:

- “Atomic Tattoos,” *99% Invisible*, January 15, 2019. Webpage and Podcast [Link](#).
- Elaine Tyler May, “Containment at Home: Cold War, Warm Hearth” and “Echoes of the Cold War, The Aftermath of September 11, 2001” in *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1998), pp. 19-38, 217-228. Chapters and full e-book also available through NJIT Library [here](#).

In-Class Activity 15

Thurs, Nov 14. What Moon Exploration Revealed About Planet Earth

Reading:

- Jill Lepore, “Fifty Years Ago We Landed on the Moon. Why Should We Care Now?” *The New York Times*, June 14, 2019. [Link](#). After reading Lepore’s book review essay, you can deepen your understanding of it by listening to the following podcast with the author: “Jill Lepore on the 50th Anniversary of the Moon Landing” with host Pamela Paul (Interview), *The New York Times Book Review Podcast*, June 21, 2019. [Link](#)
- Neil Maher, “Not Everyone Wanted A Man on the Moon,” *The New York Times*, July 16, 2019. [Link](#)
- Neil Maher, “How Many Times Does a River Have to Burn Before it Matters?” *The New York Times*, June 21, 2019. [Link](#)

In-Class Activity 16

Mon, Nov 18. Assessing Medical Technology in the U.S. Healthcare System

Reading:

- Lewis Thomas, “The Technology of Medicine,” in *Lives of the Cell: Notes of a Biology Watcher* (New York: Vintage, 1974), pp. 29-34. (This essay appeared originally in *The New England Journal of Medicine* December 9, 1971; 285: 1366-1368.)
- Arnold S. Relman, “The Medical-Industrial Complex,” *New England Journal of Medicine* October 23, 1980; 303: 963-970. [Link](#)

Reading Response Assignment 5 (This assignment will be distributed and completed online before class)

Thurs, Nov 21. The Ironies of Medical Progress

Reading: Edward Tenner, “Medicine: Conquest of the Catastrophic,” in *Why Things Bite Back: Technology and the Revenge of Unintended Consequences* (New York: Vintage, 1996), pp. 33-59.

In-Class Activity 17

Mon, Nov 25. Personal Computing / World Wide Web / Internet

Reading:

Primary Sources

- Bill Gates, “Open Letter to Hobbyists,” *Computer Notes*, February 3, 1976.
- Tim Berners-Lee. *Weaving the Web: The Original Design and Ultimate Destiny of the World Wide Web*. (New York: HarperCollins), 2000, chapter 1-3, pgs 1-34.
- Bill Gates. *The Internet Tidal Wave*, Memo, May 26, 1995.

In-Class Activity 18

Tues, Nov 26. The 2000s: The iDecade

Watch the following video on Netflix before attending class

Video: CNN’s *The 2000s*: Episode 5, The iDecade [Link](#).

Reading: Carly Casella, “Turns Out Storytelling Isn’t Always the Best Way to Get People to Believe Facts,” *Science Alert*, August 25, 2019. [Link](#)

In-Class Activity 19

THANKSGIVING BREAK

Mon, Dec 2. The Maintainers

Online Reading:

Please read McCray’s article first and at least one of the other two articles below, and then figure out who the “maintainers” and their historians are. These articles and related materials can be found on the Maintainers website [here](#).

- W. Patrick McCray, “It’s Not All Lightbulbs,” *Aeon*, October 12, 2016. [Link](#)
- Andrew Russell and Lee Vinsel, “Hail the Maintainers,” *Aeon*, April 07, 2016. [Link](#)
- Andrew Russell and Lee Vinsel, “Let’s Get Excited About Maintenance!” *The New York Times*, July 22, 2017. [Link](#)

In-Class Activity 20

Thurs, Dec 5. Privacy and Facebook Democracy

Mandatory Reading for Final Exam

Reading:

- Chris Hughes, “It’s Time to Break Up Facebook,” *The New York Times*, May 9, 2019. [Link](#)
- Steve Lohr, “Chris Hughes Worked to Create Facebook. Now, He Wants to Break It Up,” *The New York Times*, July 25, 2019. [Link](#)
- Gabrielle Rejouis, “Why is it OK for Employers to Constantly Surveil Workers?” *Slate*, September 2, 2019. [Link](#) [Note Labor Day 2019 Publication Date!]

Mon, Dec 9. Why Study Technology and Culture in Context? / Exam Review

Mon, Dec 16. TAKE HOME FINAL EXAM DUE ONLINE BY NOON